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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

OPERATION RÖSSELSPRUNG AND THE ELIMINATION OF TITO, 25 MAY 1944: A FAILURE IN PLANNING AND INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: OPERATION RÖSSELSPRUNG AND THE ELIMINATION OF TITO, 25 MAY 1944: A FAILURE IN PLANNING AND INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT

Author: Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne D. Eyre, Canadian Army

Thesis: Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG failed due to mediocre intelligence support and inadequate tactical level planning.

Discussion:

Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG was a Second World War German operation conducted in Bosnia, which aimed at eliminating the leadership of the Partisan movement, namely Marshal Josip-Broz Tito. It was a direct action raid, which involved an airborne (parachute and glider) assault by 500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* (Parachute) Battalion on the suspected site of Tito's Headquarters and a subsequent linkup with the German XV Mountain Corps converging from all directions.

Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG failed due to mediocre intelligence support and inadequate tactical level planning. Intelligence shortfalls were rooted primarily in poor German inter-organization relations and cooperation, including the sharing of intelligence, which resulted in missed opportunities and a failure to pinpoint Tito's location with sufficient precision. Given the quality of intelligence provided, the plan for the airborne assault did not include sufficient flexibility for the execution of contingencies.

Conclusions:

There are three major conclusions from the failure of this operation that can be applied to contemporary operations of a similar nature:

The first deals with tactics to be employed in the face of uncertain intelligence. The degree of intelligence certainty is critical in determining both the size of the force and the extent of the objective area in a direct action raid.

The second is the requirement for contingency planning. Contingency planning provides commanders with flexibility once an operation has commenced to deal with the unexpected, and is especially vital in the face of uncertain intelligence.

The third, and probably most critical, concerns the importance of interagency intelligence cooperation. It is vital that different intelligence organizations that are pursuing a similar goal, especially in the same theatre of operations, cooperate to the greatest extent possible.

OPERATION RÖSSELSPRUNG
AND THE ELIMINATION OF TITO, 25 MAY 1944:
A FAILURE IN PLANNING AND INTELLIGENCE SUPPORT

By Lieutenant-Colonel Wayne D. Eyre

Study and discussion of terrorist and other rogue organizations that use asymmetric means to achieve their aims has gained currency in the last decade, and has become extremely topical since the attacks of 11 September 2001. Military ‘special operations’ to eliminate the upper echelons of these organizations, generally conducted against irregular opponents and in environments of complex terrain containing a hostile or ambivalent civilian population, are becoming the norm. Operations of this type, however, are not new and lessons drawn from history can prove invaluable in their planning and execution.

Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG (‘Knight’s Move’ in English and named after the special movement qualities of the chess piece) was a Second World War German operation in Bosnia aimed at eliminating the leadership of the Partisan movement, namely Marshal Josip-Broz Tito. It was a direct action raid, which involved an airborne (parachute and glider) assault by 500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* (Parachute) Battalion on the suspected site of Tito’s Headquarters and a subsequent linkup with the German XV Mountain Corps converging from all directions. One can garner very relevant lessons from the failure of this operation to apply to the present and future.

Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG failed due to mediocre intelligence support and inadequate tactical level planning. Intelligence shortfalls were rooted primarily in poor

German inter-organization relations and cooperation, including the sharing of intelligence, which resulted in missed opportunities and a failure to pinpoint Tito's location with sufficient precision. Given the quality of intelligence provided, the plan for the airborne assault did not include sufficient flexibility for the execution of contingencies. As background, this paper will discuss the rise of the Partisans and German counter-Partisan operations in general and the planning and execution of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG in detail. It will then examine the reasons for failure, and finally, it will draw several conclusions that are relevant for contemporary operations.

BACKGROUND

In the West this operation has been thought historically insignificant, since it did not succeed and its actions were greatly overshadowed during this period by both the fall of Rome and, moreover, the Normandy invasion. Furthermore, fifty years of Yugoslav Communist propaganda aimed at elevating the status of Tito and drafting history in the most favorable terms for the Partisan movement, coupled with inaccurate reports from wartime German and British sources, have colored events. In support of the aim stated above, as a precursor this paper will clarify the historical events of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG and the actions leading up to it as part of the background discussion.

The Rise of the Partisan Threat

Popular resistance to the occupation of Yugoslavia by the Germans and Italians emerged shortly after the incredibly rapid, yet by then characteristic, defeat of the country

by two German armies and supporting Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian forces in April of 1941. Yugoslavia was partitioned amongst the victors, and an extremely nationalist, Fascist government, the *Ustachi*, was established in Croatia. The Germans commenced to exploit the resource and labour potential of the country, while concurrently the *Ustachi*, tacitly supported by the Italians, began a campaign of terror that was to foreshadow the genocidal atrocities of the 1990s. “In such an atmosphere, it was not long before active resistance began.”¹

The first resistance organization to gain preeminence was the predominantly Serb-based *Chetnik* movement (sometimes known as the Royalists), led by Draza Mihailovic. The *Chetniks* focused on returning the exiled Serbian King Peter to power and reestablishing Royal Yugoslavia. Although primarily based in Serbia, they had reach throughout Yugoslavia, especially in the Serb populated areas of Bosnia and the Krajina region of Croatia (a region abutting the western Bosnian border). Initially focused on fighting the Axis occupiers, their military actions quickly became directed at destroying Tito’s Partisans and the situation took on the trappings of a civil war. They actively collaborated with the Germans to fight Tito’s forces, or more often than not, preferred to wait passively in the mountains hoping for the Allies to drive the invaders out after the Germans destroyed the Partisans. Quickly tiring of internal strife and the *Chetniks’* lack of action against the Axis, the Allies dropped all meaningful support for them by the end of 1943, and ceased all contact with them by the spring of 1944².

¹ R d’Arcy Ryan, The Guerilla Campaign in Yugoslavia (Camberley: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1994), 3.

² Robert B. Asprey, War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History, Volume 1 (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1975), 474.

The Communists were the driving force behind the second resistance organization to rise against the Axis. Although formally outlawed in pre-war Yugoslavia, members of the country's Communist Party had gained experience fighting in Spain and, by necessity, had formed an underground organization to keep hidden from the Royalist government in Belgrade. The Party was spread countrywide and drew from all ethnic groups, a fact which would greatly assist their later recruiting efforts. Tito, the Party's Secretary-General at the outbreak of the war, initially had the Party members keep a low profile against the invaders, but, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, he was no longer hamstrung by the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and began active resistance. Over the next three years the *NOVJ* (National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia), better known as the Partisans, grew from a small force of several thousand to an army of 300,000³ that controlled large tracts of the country.

Counter-Guerrilla Operations

Axis counter-guerilla (or counter-Partisan) operations began in earnest in the autumn of 1941 with the 'First Offensive' and continued with further five 'numbered' offenses, each one aimed at eliminating the Partisan threat. These offenses, although generally causing significant Partisan casualties (50 percent alone during the Second Offensive⁴), were characterized by poor coordination amongst the different Axis forces (and for that matter with the *Chetnik* collaborators and *Ustachi* puppets) and by allowing the *NOVJ* mobile guerilla forces to escape. The Sixth Offensive, launched as Italy

³ John Clearwater, "Undercover: Marshal Tito slipped through the fingers of the SS in the spring of 1944", World War II, Vol 13, (February 1999): 60.

⁴ Ryan, The Guerilla Campaign in Yugoslavia, 7.



MAP 1 - Bosnia

Source: Canadian Task-Force Bosnia-Herzegovina,
Operation PALLADIUM Rotation 6 files.

collapsed, again lacked coordination. The *NOVJ* beat the Germans in the race to seize abandoned Italian supply dumps on the Adriatic coast and were able to equip themselves with more than 10 divisions worth of equipment.⁵ One of the fallouts of this operation, however, was the withdrawal of the Supreme Headquarters *NOVJ* (Tito's headquarters) from Jajce, in central Bosnia, as the Germans' advance threatened the town. It relocated to the west, to the quiet logging town of Drvar securely set in the Unac River valley between the Klekovaca and Bobara Mountain ranges.

After 1941, the Balkans provided a much-required supply of natural resources for the Reich. One source, citing postwar reports from the Nuremberg trials, stated the

⁵ Ryan, *The Guerilla Campaign in Yugoslavia*, 12.

Balkans provided “50% of petroleum, 100% of chrome, 60% of bauxite and 21% of Copper”⁶ for the German war machine. To protect both this vital source of resources and the lines of communication for its substantial occupation forces in Greece, Germany had some 18 Divisions in Yugoslavia, along with numerous other independent formations.⁷ This was an ulcer in the side of Germany as they sought to find troops to bolster their deteriorating position on the Eastern Front. These forces were still not sufficient to dominate the country and consequently they occupied the major urban areas and important communication nodes, while Partisan forces controlled the rugged countryside and were free to attack at will. The resulting situation for the Germans was dismal. In fact, in some areas morale was so low amongst German troops that many thought their prospects were better against the Russians and took the extraordinary move of volunteering for transfer to the Eastern Front rather than take their chances against the Partisans.⁸

To Field Marshal Maximilian *Freiherr* von Weichs, who was not only the Commander of Army Group F responsible for Yugoslavia and Albania but also oversaw *Luftwaffe* General Alexander Löhr’s Army Group E in Greece⁹, it was very apparent that

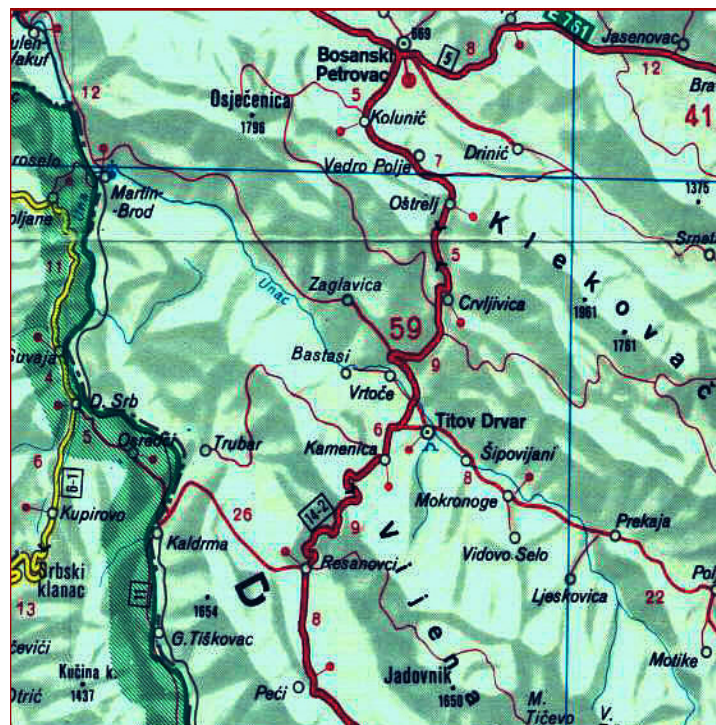
⁶ Stevo Popovic, Desant Na Drvar (Sarajevo: Cetvrto Izdanje, 1982), 17.

⁷ Robert M. Kennedy, German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans (1941-1944) United States Army Center for Military History Publication 104-18 (Washington: Department of the Army, 1954), 65. (Hereafter cited as USA CMH Publication 104-18.)

⁸ Ryan, The Guerilla Campaign in Yugoslavia, 13.

⁹ Several common sources mistakenly assume that Löhr was the supreme commander of the Balkans. For example, see Antonio Munoz, Forgotten Legions: Obscure Combat Formations of the Waffen-SS (Boulder: Paladin Press: 1991), 19, and James Lucas, Kommando: German Special Forces of World War Two (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing, 1985), 105. During the war there were occasions that *Luftwaffe* officers commanded *Wehrmacht* formations, especially in the Balkans where many former Hapsburg army officers, such as Löhr, were assigned regardless of parent service. David T. Zabecki, ed. World War II in Europe: An Encyclopedia (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999) 392-393.

he lacked the manpower and equipment to gain total victory in the field over the Partisan masses. The terrain was extremely well suited for guerrilla operations and very much favored the Partisans. He believed that the elimination of Tito, the personification of the Partisan movement and its center of gravity, would eliminate their will to fight. Hitler, who had personally ordered the elimination of Tito, shared this belief.



MAP 2 - Drvar Area

Source: "Maps of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina."
Accessed on Internet 21 January 2002. URL:
<<http://www.kakarigi.net/maps/>>

The task to locate Tito was assumed by several German intelligence organizations, including SS special operations expert Major Otto Skorzeny, operating independently on Hitler's direct orders, and elements of the *Brandenburg* Division, the *Abwehr's* special operations arm. The *Brandenburgers* had been involved on the attack on Jajce and now had their agents looking for clues as to Tito's new location. The

detailed task went to the *Brandenburg* Lieutenant Kirchner and his troops, and in a series of events to be discussed later, Tito and his headquarters were discovered from several sources to be in Drvar.

Planning and Preparation

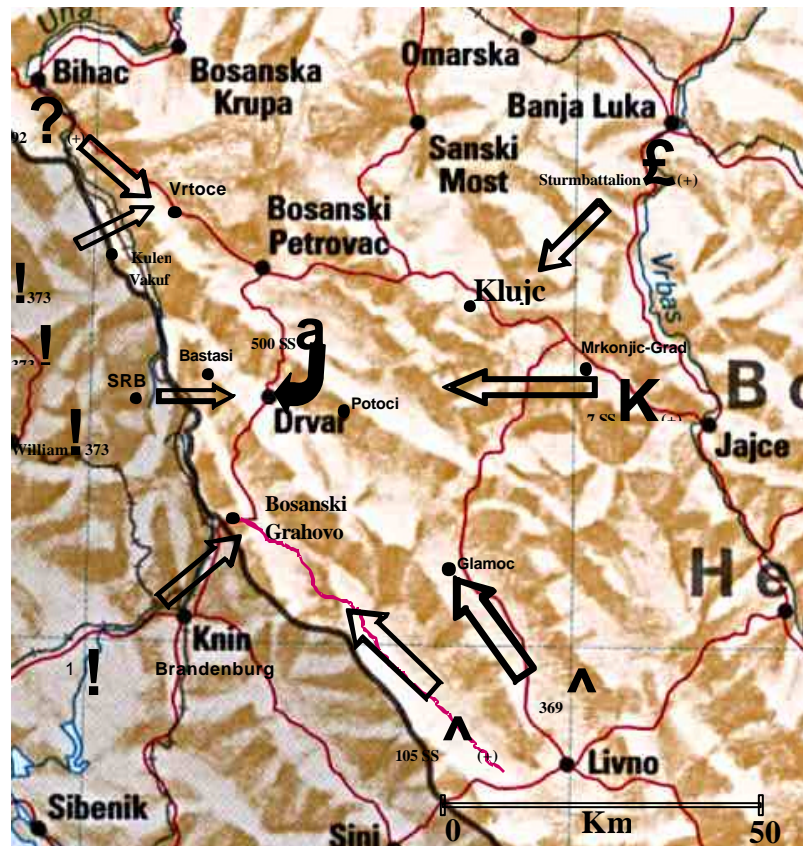
Planning for the operation began in earnest. Field Marshal von Weichs signed the order on 6 May¹⁰, and balancing synchronization of the operation with operational security, General Lothar Rendulic issued the Second Panzer Army order for Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG two weeks later, on the 21st of May, allowing only three full days for subordinates to conduct battle procedure. Given potential security leaks in the form of Partisan agents, this was a prudent move. Rendulic, whose Second Panzer Army paradoxically did not include any panzer divisions¹¹, directed that the XV *Gebirgs* (Mountain) Army Corps, commanded by Lieutenant-General Ernest von Leyser, was to execute the operation.

A heavy bombardment of Partisan positions in and around Drvar by *Fliegerführer Kroatien* (Air Command Croatia) aircraft was to precede a parachute and glider assault by 500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion whose task it was to destroy Tito and his headquarters. Concurrently, XV Corps elements would converge on Drvar from all directions, in order to linkup with 500 SS on the same day, 25 May 1944. Speed, shock and surprise were key for the paratroopers of 500 SS to accomplish their mission.

¹⁰ Michael McConville, “Knight’s Move in Bosnia and the British Rescue of Tito: 1944”, Royal United Services Institute Journal, (December 1997): 62.

¹¹ If a German formation had panzer units at one time, it was generally given the title ‘Panzer’, regardless of its ensuing makeup.

Excerpts from the XV Corps order for this operation are very insightful and are included at Annex A.



MAP 3 - XV Mountain Corps Plan

500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion was a relatively new unit. It was formed in the autumn of 1943 by direction of Hitler's headquarters for the purpose of performing special missions. Sometimes referred to as a penal unit, it included many volunteers but for the most part initially, the enlisted ranks came from 'probationary soldiers'. These were soldiers and officers who were serving sentences for minor infractions of a disciplinary instead of a criminal nature, imposed in the draconian environment of the

Waffen SS.¹² Dishonored men of all ranks of the SS could redeem themselves in this battalion and once joined had their rank restored.¹³ The unit conducted parachute school at the *Luftwaffe's* Paratroop School Number Three near Sarajevo, Yugoslavia in November and finished in Papa, Hungary, early in 1944, as the school relocated there.¹⁴ After training was completed the unit participated in several minor Partisan drives before returning to its training grounds on the outskirts of Sarajevo in mid April and remained there under strict security measures.¹⁵ While there, the 27-year-old SS *Hauptsturmführer* (Captain) Kurt Rybka took command of the battalion.

Rybka received an outline of the operation on 20 May and more detailed orders the following day. Realizing there were not enough gliders or transport aircraft to deploy 500 SS in one lift, he devised a plan where 654 troops would conduct the initial assault at 0700 hours, and a further 220 would reinforce as a second wave some five hours later.¹⁶ The intelligence picture that was portrayed to him was based on available sources, and recent air photos were used to aid in the planning. The suspected location of Tito's headquarters, a cemetery on dominating ground, was given the codename 'Citadel' and the important crossroads in town was entitled the 'Western Cross'.

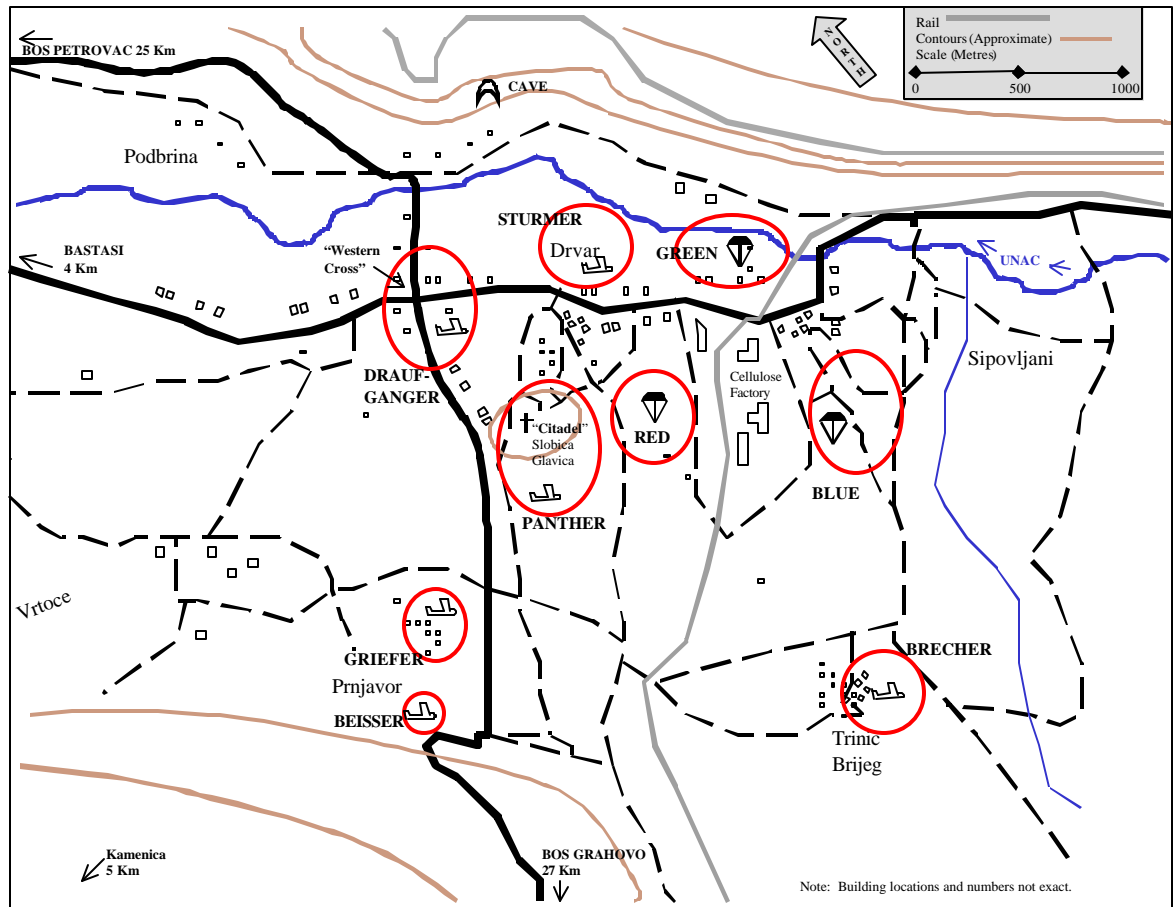
¹² Adolf Kunzmann and Siegfried Milius, Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild (Osnabruck: Munin, 1986), 16.

¹³ Greg Way, SS Fallschirmjäger Battalion 500/600, Accessed on Internet 24 October 2001. URL: <www.eagle19.freemove.co.uk/ss500.htm>.

¹⁴ Munoz, Forgotten Legions, 13.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

¹⁶ Lucas, Storming Eagles: German Airborne Forces in World War Two (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1988), 130.



MAP 4 - 500 SS Fallschirmjäger Plan

Source: Locations based on map in Gojko Jokic, *Drvar Grad-Heroj* (Belgrade: Turisticki Vodic, 1977), 14. This map was in turn based on a German air photo captured after the operation

The town was to be secured by 314 parachute troops. They were split into Red (led by Rybka), Green, and Blue Groups and were based on elements of the unit's three rifle companies. Another 354 troops, based on remaining members of the rifle companies and the heavy weapons company, were split into six assault groups for specific missions. *Panther* Group of 110 soldiers, the largest, was to capture Citadel and destroy Tito's headquarters. *Greifer* Group of 40 soldiers was to destroy the British military mission. *Sturmer* Group of 50 men was to destroy the Soviet military mission. *Brecher* Group of 50 men was to destroy the U.S. military mission. *Draufgaenger* Group was to capture the

Western Cross and the suspected nearby Partisan communication facility. Of the 70 personnel in *Draufgaegner* Group, 40 belonged to the *Brandenburg Benesch* Group (some of whom were *Chetniks* and other local Bosnians) and six came from an *Abwehr* detachment commanded by Lieutenant Zavadil¹⁷. These attachments were given specific intelligence collection, translation and communication tasks. *Beisser* Group of 20 soldiers was to seize an outpost radio station, then assist *Greifer* group. Finally, the second wave, based on the Field Reserve Company (basically the training company) and the remainder of the unit was to insert by parachute at 1200 hours.

For security reasons, the Battalion's soldiers were not briefed on the operation until several hours before it was launched¹⁸, but preliminary moves began on 22 May as the unit, dressed in non-descript *Wehrmacht* uniforms for security reasons¹⁹, was transported by truck to three assembly areas, Nagy-Betskerek, Zagreb and Banja Luka. There they linked up with their Luftwaffe transport from *Fliegerführer Kroatien*, some of which had been brought in from France and Germany specifically for the operation. The 1st and 2nd Squadrons of Towing Group 1, and 2nd and 3rd Battalions of Air Landing Group 1, all with 10-passenger DFS 230 gliders and towed by either Hs 126 or Ju 87 (Stukas in a towing role) aircraft, would transport the glider-borne force. The 2nd

¹⁷ Second Panzer Army Operation Order, 21 May 1944; National Archives Records Administration T314, Roll 563, first frame 690 (Hereafter cited as NARA T314/563/000690); and Captain Leroy Vogel, "Excerpts from an Interrogation Report of First Lieutenant Murad Ferid, a Military Intelligence Officer in the Balkans, 21 December 1945, Military Intelligence Service Center, USFET, CI-IIR/39", Covert Warfare: Intelligence, Counterintelligence and Military Deception During the World War II Era, Volume 13. The Final Solution of the Abwehr, John Mendelsohn, Ed. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1989), 14. (Hereafter cited as Covert Warfare, Volume 13.)

¹⁸ Kunzmann and Milius, Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild, 17.

¹⁹ Munoz, Forgotten Legions.22.

Battalion of Transport Group 4, with about 40 Ju 52 transports, would deliver the parachute force.²⁰ By 24 May, battle procedure was complete.

Partisan Disposition

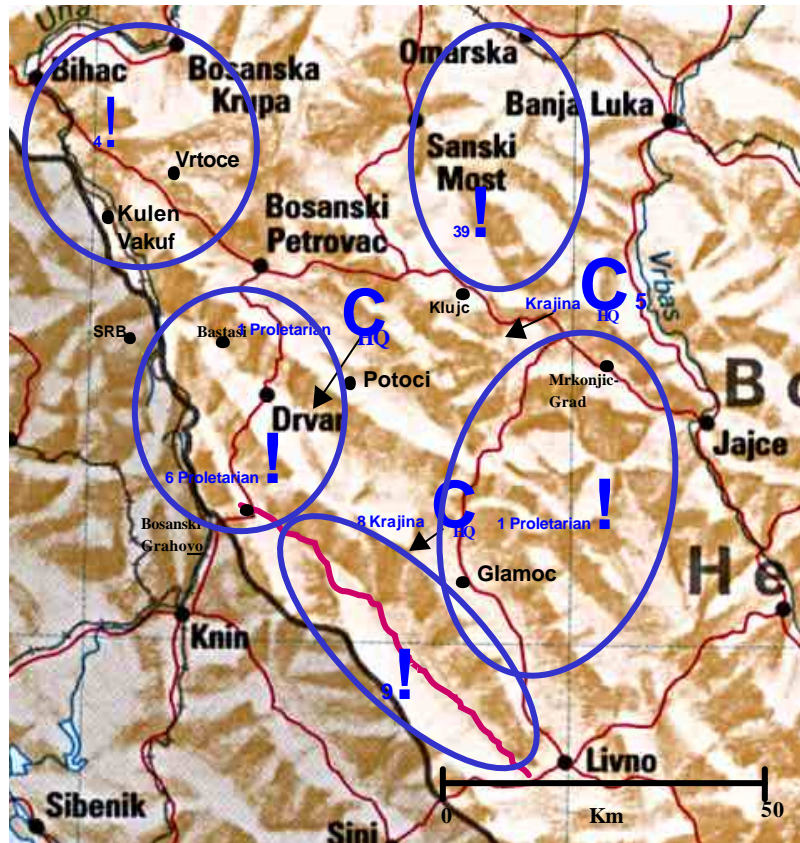
German intelligence claimed about 12,000 Partisans were active in the area of operations²¹, but Yugoslav sources place this number around 16,000, not including auxiliary support, schools, or members of the *SKOJ* (Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia).²² Immediately surrounding Drvar were the First (*Nikola Tesla*) and Six *Proletarian* Divisions of the First *Proletarian* Corps, with the Corps HQ based six kilometres to the east in Mokronoge. Of immediate concern was the Third *Lika* Brigade of the First Division stationed five kilometers south of Drvar in Kamenica, whose four battalions of were the most potent reaction force²³. The deployment areas of the Partisan V and VIII Corps and their subordinate divisions are indicated in Map 5.

²⁰ Fliegerführer Kroatien, Operation Order for Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG, 21 May 1944: NARA T314/563/000666.

²¹ 1st Brandenburg Regiment operation order for Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG, 21 May 1944: NARA T314/563/000682.

²² Miran Sattler, Desant Na Drvar (Zagreb: Branimar Zganjer, 1986), 47-48.

²³ These battalions had an approximate strength of only 200 personnel who were lightly armed, but were extremely familiar with the terrain and local inhabitants. Zdrankvko Kelecevic, interview by the author in Vrtoce, Bosnia, 22 July 2000. He was present the day of the operation and spent 17 years as the curator of the museum in Drvar, which was located at the site of the cave and dedicated to this battle. Unfortunately, this museum and its contents were destroyed in the aftermath of battle in 1995.

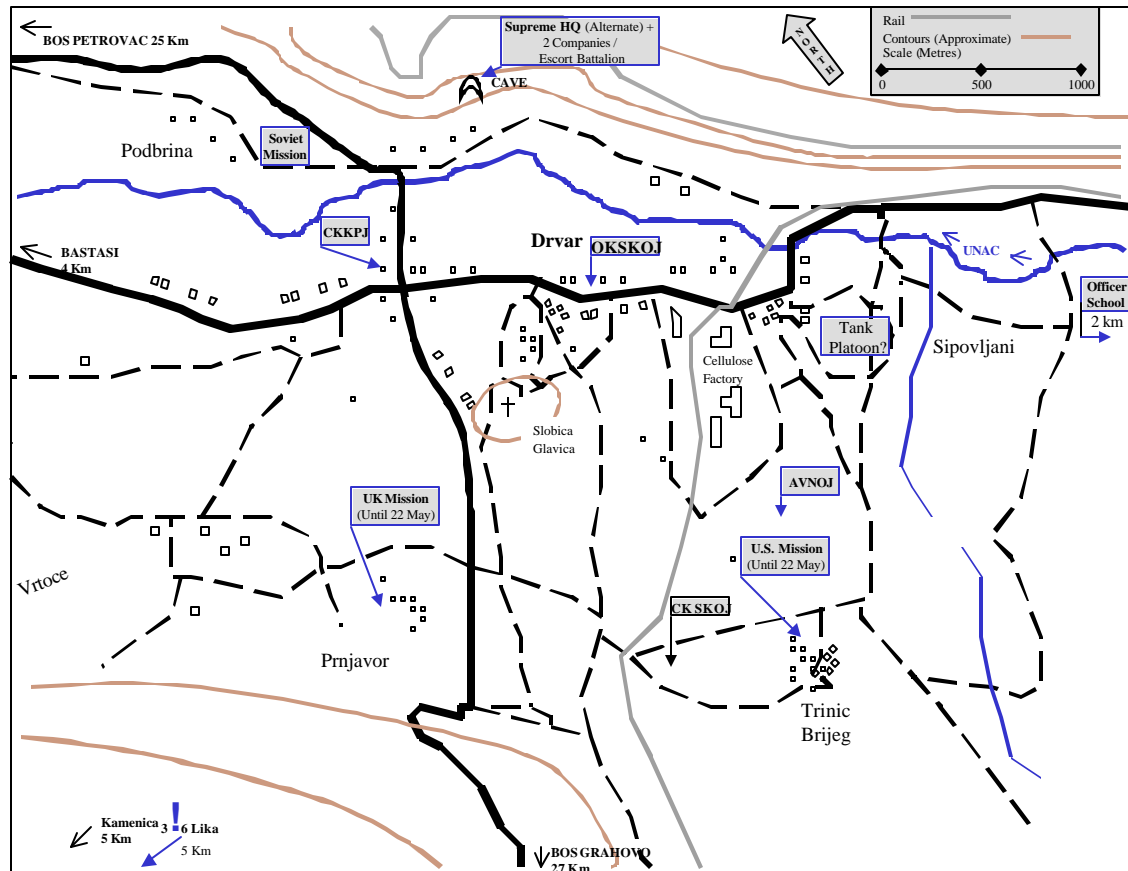


MAP 5 - Partisan Deployment Areas in North-West Bosnia

Source: Sattler, Desant Na Drvar, 47.

Within Drvar itself there was a mixed bag of military liaison missions, support and escort troops and both the Supreme Headquarters of the *NOVJ* and the Central Committee of the Yugoslav Communist Party. The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia was located in town, and had just held a congress of over 800 youths in attendance²⁴, some of whom were still in the process of departing. As well, the *AVNOJ* (Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia) had their headquarters on the outskirts of town and in the nearby village of Sipovljani there was the Partisan officers' school with about 130 students. The Soviet

²⁴ Gojko Jokic, Desant Na Drvar (Belgrade: Turisticki Vodic, 1977), 11-12.



MAP 6 - Partisan Locations in Drvar

Source: Sattler, *Desant Na Drvar*, 97. CKKPJ – Central Committee of Communist Party of Yugoslavia, OKSKOJ / CKSKOJ – District / Central Committee of the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia, AVNOJ – Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia.

Union, Britain and the United States all had military missions to Tito's headquarters in some of the adjoining small villages. Finally, Tito's Escort Battalion of three companies, two of which were with him, was present to provide personal protection to the Marshal and the various headquarters and missions.

Tito's personal headquarters was initially located in a cave immediately north of Drvar and overlooked the town. When rumors surfaced that this location had become compromised, he moved his main headquarters to another cave in the town of Basasi, some seven kilometres to the west. His Drvar cave was used primarily during the day and he would return to Bastasi at night for security reasons. The location the Germans

believed housed his headquarters, the cemetery at Slobica Glavica (Objective Citadel), was, in fact, sparsely manned.²⁵

Tito's birthday was the 25th of May. On the evening of the 24th, a celebration was held in Drvar, and, due to the festivities finishing late, Tito decided to spend the night in his Drvar cave. Despite his initial concerns that caused him to relocate to Bastasi, he felt confident all would be quiet. It almost proved to be a fatal error.

Execution

Tito, still somewhat sluggish from the previous evening's celebration, awoke to the attack on Drvar. Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG began according to plan on 25 May with a preparatory aerial bombardment of suspected Partisan location in Drvar, including the cemetery. This bombardment was to begin at 0635 hours and consisted of five squadrons of Ju 87 Stuka dive-bombers, older He 46 medium bombers, and Italian made Ca 314 and Cr 42 medium-bombers²⁶. It appears that the plan was closely followed. P-Hour²⁷ began at 0700 hours. Although dense smoke from the bombardment reduced visibility, most pilots were able to orient themselves on the Western Cross and land gliders or drop their paratroops relatively close to designated objectives. Several gliders did land off course, including one in front of the main headquarters cave in Bastasi²⁸,

²⁵ This is a key point which many English language sources, including the popular accounts by James Lucas, have mistaken by identifying the cave as Objective Citadel. Lucas, *Kommando*, 112; and Lucas, *Storming Eagles: German Airborne Forces in World War Two* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1988), 132.

²⁶ Fliegerführer Kroatien Operation Order 21 May 1944. NARA T314/563/000666.

²⁷ P-Hour is the designation of the time when the first paratrooper is dispatched from an aircraft.

²⁸ Based on extant documentation, it appears this glider suffered mechanical difficulties and landed early, and was not, in fact, on a separate mission to the primary headquarters cave.

where members of the Escort Battalion immediately killed the occupants before they could exit. Between two and four others landed in Vrtoce and the occupants had to fight their way into Drvar.²⁹ German sources claim the parachute jump was made at 60 to 75 metres above ground level³⁰, but pictures taken from the ground of the jump indicate the it was somewhat higher.³¹

Once on the ground, the *Fallschirmjäger* quickly seized control of Drvar. Panther Group, supported by Red Group, rapidly overcame token resistance at the cemetery and Rybka established battalion headquarters behind its walls. The only forces of consequence located there were the crews manning three anti-aircraft machine guns, of which two escaped. Needless to say, neither Tito nor his headquarters were found. *Greiffer* and *Brecher* Groups came up empty handed as the British and American missions were not present in their accommodations. Elements of *Sturmer* Group landed in a field immediately south of the cave and came under fire from Escort Battalion members positioned in the high ground surrounding Tito's location. The most intense fighting was with *Draufgänger* Group in the area of the Western Cross who assaulted what they believed to be the Partisan communications center, but was in fact the office

²⁹ Branko Vjestica, interview by the author in Vrtoce, Bosnia, 22 July 2000. Vjestica was an 18-year-old member of the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia who lived in Vrtoce (and still does) and was wounded during this particular engagement.

³⁰ Kunzmann and Milius, *Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild*, 17.

³¹ Photographs seen in *Titov Drvar – Istorijske fotografije* (Belgrade: Stampa Bigz, 1981), 22, 23 and 35. A journalist on the ground estimated the jumps at 200 feet, but this may be an exaggeration given the sensationalized nature of his article. Stoyan Pribichevich, "Thrilling Escape from Nazi's Raid on Tito's Headquarters", *The Fighting Forces*, Vol. 21/3 (1944): 132. On average, German airborne operations during the Second World War had a jumping altitude of just over 330 feet, according to a post-war study. Hellmuth Reinhardt, *Airborne Operations: A German Appraisal*. *United States Army Center for Military History Publication 104-13*, (Washington: Center of Military History, 1989), 50. (Hereafter cited as USA CMH Publication 104-13.)

building for the Communist Party's Central Committee. After intense close quarter combat against fanatical resistance, the building was basically leveled with satchel charges³².

Also subject to very fierce fighting were Blue and Green Groups, who were attempting to establish a cordon in the eastern part of town, where most of the population was located. Although not mentioned in German reports, Yugoslav accounts proudly cite a Partisan counter-attack by four captured Italian CV-34 tanks³³. Not inflicting any noteworthy damage, three tanks were quickly disabled and the remaining one escaped to Bastasi.³⁴ Also creating a problem for the Germans, especially in the more populated areas, was resistance from the members of the Communist Youth League of Yugoslavia who remained in Drvar and whose enthusiasm in taking up arms (whatever were available) against the attackers could explain some accounts of spontaneous uprisings.

Immediately upon realizing the nature of the attack, the candidates from the officers' school marched to the sound of gunfire. Armed with only pistols and the odd rifle, they split into two groups. The smaller group crossed to the north side of the Unac River and advanced west along the rail line with the aim of protecting Tito's headquarters. The larger group, bolstered by the retrieval of several misdirected drops of

³² Lucas, Kommando, 117.

³³ There is mention of destroyed and captured enemy tanks in several German post-operation reports, most notably a Consolidated Casualty Report from XV Mountain Corps covering the period 25 May to 6 June 1944. NARA T314/563/000372. It is unknown if these are the same tanks, or if they were some of those identified in the XV Corps operation order (at Annex A) as part of the 'considerable' number in the area of Bos Petrovac.

³⁴ The story of a local 16-year-old girl, Mika Bosnic, has gained mythical fame. According to Yugoslav accounts, lacking available anti-tank weapons, German soldiers placed a blanket over the view port of the remaining tank to blind the crew. Bosnic, at the time detained by the Germans, raced forward and removed the blanket. She was killed but the tank escaped. The chassis of this tank remains in Drvar at the former museum site outside of the cave. Popovic, Desant Na Drvar, 67; and Svetozar Sevo, Vazdusni Desant na Titovu Pecinu (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1963), 80.

German ammunition and arms, attacked Green and Blue Groups in their eastern flank beginning at approximately 0800 hours. Although the officer candidates suffered severe casualties, the pressure of their attack on this flank was maintained throughout the day.³⁵

By about 0900 hours, the Germans had secured the majority of Drvar, but they still had no trace of Tito. Before the operation, every *Fallschirmjäger* was issued with a picture of him³⁶ and they now went door to door, brutally questioning those civilians they could find. There are many Yugoslav based stories of German atrocities against the civilian population at this point in the battle, including herding people into houses to be burned alive, but it is difficult to determine where the Germans would find the time to do this based on the influence of other events.

By mid-morning it became apparent to Rybka that Partisan resistance was concentrated to the north in the area of the headquarters cave. He surmised that there must be something to protect in this area, and if Tito was in Drvar this would be his likely location. Launching a red flare as a pre-arranged signal, he rallied his soldiers for an attack on the new objective. Around 1030 hours he launched a frontal attack across the Unac River, supported by at least one MG-42 medium machine gun firing into the mouth of the cave. They made it as far as the base of the hill leading up to the cave, less than fifty metres from its mouth, before being repulsed. The *Fallschirmjäger*s from 500 SS, already parched from a lack of water, had suffered severe casualties.

Concurrent with the mounting and execution of this attack, more Partisan forces were beginning to converge on Drvar. From the west and southwest came three of the

³⁵ Sattler, *Desant Na Drvar*, 90-92; and Kelecevic interview.

³⁶ Petar V. Dražović-Djure, *Yugoslavia in the Second World War* (Belgrade: Borba, 1977), 151.

battalions of the Third Brigade of the Sixth *Lika* Division. One battalion attacked directly towards the German position at the cemetery while the other two swung around to the west through Vrtoče to hit the Germans in the western flank with a view to relieve pressure on the cave area.³⁷

At approximately 1115 hours, during a lull in the fighting and after the attack had been repulsed, Tito managed to escape from the cave. This act has been inaccurately described in many accounts.³⁸ After the first attack failed, Tito, escorted by several staff, climbed down a rope through a trap door in a platform at the mouth of the cave. He then followed a small creek leading to the Unac River, then diagonally climbed the heights to the east of the cave, a route which would provide cover for most of the way. From the Klekovaca ridge overlooking Drvar, he began his withdrawal east to Potoci.

1200 hours was P-Hour for the reinforcing second wave of 220 *Fallschirmjäger*s who jumped in two groups just to the west of Objective Citadel. Their drop zone was situated within Partisan fields of fire and thus the wave suffered many casualties as they hit the ground. Newly armed with the remaining reinforcements, Rybka attempted another assault, but by now the pressure on his flanks was too great and the attack again floundered. Fighting continued throughout the afternoon with both sides taking heavy casualties. By late afternoon Rybka, realizing that the capture of Tito was improbable at this point and that the linkup with ground forces would not happen as planned, ordered a

³⁷ Kelecevic interview.

³⁸ Many accounts describe Tito escaping through a secret exit or trap door in the back of the cave. For example, see Munoz, *Forgotten Legions*, 29-30. The source of this inaccuracy may be the unclear description of the escape provided by Brigadier-General Fitzroy MacLean in many of his writings. MacLean was the head of the British mission to Tito, but was in London at the time of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG. For example, see Fitzroy Maclean, *The Heretic: The Life and Times of Josip Broz Tito* (New York: Harper and Harper Publishers, 1957), 216.

withdrawal. He initially planned to have a defensive perimeter encompassing both the cellulose factory and the cemetery, but after realizing the extent of his casualties and his consequent inability to hold the large perimeter, he reduced his defensive position to include just the cemetery. At about 1800 hours, while withdrawing under fire, he was injured by a grenade blast and was out of the battle.³⁹

The withdrawal to the cemetery was done under considerable pressure. At least one group of *Fallschirmjäger*s was cutoff and wiped out. By about 2130 hours, the remnants of the Battalion had consolidated in the cemetery. Partisan forces had the remnants of 500 SS completely surrounded. Throughout the night attacks against the German position continued. The fourth battalion of the Third *Lika* Brigade, which had arrived later than the other three and been kept in reserve, was launched with the remnants of the other three battalions against the cemetery. Elements of the Ninth *Dalmatian* Division joined the attacks at some point during the night, increasing the pressure⁴⁰. The *Fallschirmjäger*s continued to hold their ground, but casualties were mounting. At 0330 hours the final Partisan attack was launched, breaching the cemetery wall in several locations, but the German defence held.

Throughout the day, the progress of the converging elements of XV Mountain Corps was not as rapid as had been planned. Unexpected resistance from I, V, and VIII Partisan Corps along their axis of advance greatly hindered their movement⁴¹. Most post-operation reports cite extremely poor radio communications amongst the different

³⁹ Otto Kumm, *Prinz Eugen: The History of the 7. SS-Mountain Division* (Winnipeg: J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing, 1995), 120.

⁴⁰ Popovic, *Desant Na Drvar*, 75.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 79.

elements, causing a plague of coordination difficulties⁴². It would also appear that Allied aircraft, based in Italy, attacked the linkup forces with several sorties throughout the day⁴³, however air support from the Luftwaffe was also present throughout. In fact, an unarmed Fiesler Stork reconnaissance plane, initially intended to whisk Tito away once taken, was able to land and extract casualties, including Rybka.⁴⁴

After the last attack failed to penetrate the German defences and knowing that relief in the form of XV Mountain Corps was on the way, Tito ordered the Partisan forces to withdraw, and then made good his escape. Escorted by elements of the Third *Krajina* Brigade, he first went to Potoci, where he met up with a battalion from the First *Proletarian* Brigade, and, after discovering German troops in force in the area, made his way to Kupres. In the Kupres Valley, a Soviet Dakota aircraft stationed at a Royal Air Force base in Italy and escorted by six American Aircraft picked him up on 3 June and took him to Bari, Italy. On 6 June, a Royal Navy destroyer delivered him to the Island of Vis, along the Dalmatian Coast, to reestablish his headquarters.⁴⁵

The remnants of 500 SS were to spend the rest of the night of 25/26 May in their hasty defensive positions. They received some support at 0500 hours as a German fighter-bomber formation attacked the withdrawing Partisans. At 0700 hours, the unit finally established radio contact with the Reconnaissance Battalion of the 373rd Division

⁴² This is a common theme in post operation reports from 1st Brandenburg Regiment (NARA T314/563/000433), 373 Division (NARA T314/563/000411), XV Mountain Corps (NARA T314/563/000348) and 7 SS Mountain Division (Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 135-136).

⁴³ Lucas, Kommando, 109; and Kunzmann and Milius, Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild, 17.

⁴⁴ Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 143.

⁴⁵ McConville, "Knight's Move in Bosnia and the British Rescue of Tito: 1944", 67.

but physical linkup in Drvar with XV Mountain Corps did not occur until 1245 hours when the lead elements of the Second Battalion of the 92nd Motorized Grenadier Regiment arrived.

ANALYSIS OF FAILURE

In analyzing this operation as a failure, it is first necessary to define it as such. Next, it is appropriate to discount several popular causes for this failure. As a final step in this analysis, the paper will discuss in detail the underlying and true reasons for the operation's failure, specifically intelligence support and tactical planning.

The Outcome

Despite not eliminating Tito, the Germans were unwilling to admit defeat and viewed this operation as a success with blind arrogance. According to a self-congratulatory report from Second Panzer Army:

The operation against the partisans in Croatia [this area of Bosnia was included as part of Croatia at this time] enjoyed considerable success. I succeeded in 1) destroying the core region of the communist partisans by occupying their command and control centers and their supply installations, thereby considerably weakening their supply situation; 2) forcing the elite communist formations (1st Proletarian Division and the 3rd Lika Division [incorrect designation] to give battle and severely battering them, forcing them to withdraw due to shortages of ammunition and supplies, and avoid further combat (the 9th, 39th and 4th Tito Divisions also suffered great losses); 3) capturing landing fields used by Allied aircraft, administrative establishments, and headquarters of foreign military missions, forcing the partisans to reorganize and restructure; 4) giving the Allies

a true picture of the combat capability of the partisans; 5) obtaining important communications equipment, code keys, radios, etc. for our side; 6) achieving these successes under difficult conditions that included numerous enemy air attacks.⁴⁶

The future commander of 500 SS was even more sanguine: “Overall the operation with its jump and landing was a success. Unfortunately Tito and the Allied military delegations managed to escape.”⁴⁷ With an understanding of the German mission, this becomes a rather contradictory statement.

The overarching intent of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG was the elimination of Tito, the man who personified the Partisan movement. To the German high command, Tito was the center of gravity for the Partisans and his elimination would greatly diminish the resolve of the movement to continue. “Tito is our most dangerous enemy,” Field Marshal von Weichs was to claim before the operation.⁴⁸ Despite the words of praise, the costly operation only netted the Marshal’s uniform, in for tailoring, a Jeep, which was a gift from the American mission, and three British journalists, one of whom later escaped⁴⁹. Even the intelligence information gathered, contrary to the above report, was not of much use.⁵⁰ When the operation failed to eliminate Tito, it failed to achieve its underlying intent for being launched, and thus by no stretch can be considered to have achieved its purpose.

⁴⁶ Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 129.

⁴⁷ Kunzmann and Milius, Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild, 17.

⁴⁸ Ralph Bennett, “Knight’s Move at Drvar: Ultra and the attempt on Tito’s Life, 25 May 1944”, Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 22, No. 2, (April 1987): 196.

⁴⁹ Pribichevich, “Thrilling Escape from Nazi’s Raid on Tito’s Headquarters”, 132-136.

⁵⁰ Lucas, Kommando, 125.

Ironically, Tito's dramatic escape further solidified his deity-like stature amongst the Yugoslav population, and became part of the mythology surrounding this cult of personality. Although *NOVJ* headquarters, along with several other Partisan organizations, had their operations temporarily disrupted and several higher level personnel killed, they were quick to recover and set up in different locations. Drvar reverted to Partisan control within weeks.

Not only was the mission a complete failure, but it also resulted in the decimation of 500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion. On the morning of 26 May, it had only about 200 soldiers fit to fight, including those from its Field Reserve Company.⁵¹ It continued throughout the rest of the war as the sole SS parachute unit, with its designation later changed to 600 SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion, but Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG was to be its only combat jump of the war.

Partisan Early Warning or Delayed Linkup – Fallacious Reasons for Failure

Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG had the makings of a decisive victory of strategic significance, but, as indicated above, resulted in failure. German lack of operational security surrounding the operation could possibly be considered a factor in this failure, as many indicators were available to the Partisans suggesting its imminence. Another could be the inability of XV Mountain Corps elements to link up with 500 SS within the planned period. Neither of these reasons was fundamental to mission failure.

Given loose coalitions and shifting alliances of convenience in the Balkans, information flew freely in both directions throughout the war. All sources, ranging from

⁵¹ Kunzmann and Milius, *Fallschirmjäger der Waffen-SS im Bild*, 17.

indiscreet pillow talk by German officers with their mistresses to German exploitation of inter-Yugoslav racial hatreds were used to gain information. German use of *Ustachi* and *Chetnik* quislings was a double-edged sword, as information openly flowed through them to both sides. All parties had their informants and it was difficult to achieve total surprise in any operation.

Several indicators were present and known (or likely known) by the Partisans that implied an airborne assault was about to take place. They had been aware of the presence of 500 SS in Yugoslavia for some time, and in fact, Tito had been warned about a possible airborne assault on his headquarters when they were located in Jajce in November of 1943⁵². The sequestering of the unit for over a month prior to the operation could have been indicative of preparations for a large operation. Furthermore, the recent addition of transport aircraft and gliders to Zagreb and Banja Luka airfields could not be missed by Partisan agents and was a firm indicator of impending airborne operations.

During the latter part of Otto Skorzeny's preparations for his stillborn plan to eliminate Tito (discussed in more detail below), he quickly discovered through his agents that details of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG had been compromised.⁵³ In fact, Partisan forces had recaptured a deserter he had interrogated (more on this later) who revealed to them what information he had divulged. In another case, the Partisans found relatively detailed information about their activities in Drvar on a captured German document.⁵⁴ They had no doubt that the Germans knew the location of the headquarters. These early

⁵² Phyllis Auty, Tito: A Biography (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1970), 234.

⁵³ Otto Skorzeny, Skorzeny's Secret Missions (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1950), 150-151.

⁵⁴ Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 141.

indicators had been partly responsible for Tito relocating his main headquarters to the cave in Bastasi from Drvar and redeploying elements of 6 *Lika* Division closer to his location, but it appears no other definite action was taken.

The final indicator was the appearance of a lone German reconnaissance aircraft over Drvar on or about 22 May. It was unusual in the fact that it spent an inordinate amount of time circling the town and key objective locations, such as the adjoining villages of Prinavor and Trinic-Brijeg where the British and American missions were located. It became apparent that something imminent was in the works. The acting commander of the British mission, Major Vivian Street, surmised that it was a reconnaissance for a bombing mission, advised Tito of this, and had his mission moved. The American mission followed suit.⁵⁵

In post-war years, the Soviets charged that the British and American missions were moved as a result of signals intelligence received through ULTRA which was not shared with Tito. It was apparent from ULTRA intercepts that an operation codenamed RÖSSELSRUNG was planned for around 25 May, troops were being moved to locations with airfields, additional aircraft were being brought in from other theatres, and *Fliegerführer Kroatien* would have a key role. No mention was made of either Tito or his headquarters. Thus, the Bletchley Park analysts could not put together the pieces and did not identify the real intention of RÖSSELSRUNG until after the operation had commenced.⁵⁶ Even had they deciphered this intention, sending a warning to the British

⁵⁵ Popovic, *Desant Na Drvar*, 45; and MacLean, *Escape to Adventure* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1950), 345-350.

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion of Ultra intercepts relating to Operation RÖSSELSRUNG, see Bennett, "Knight's Move at Drvar: Ultra and the attempt on Tito's Life, 25 May 1944", 195-207.

mission with Tito would have been a different matter. Although it was technically possible, the standing policy from December 1943 was to send the mission no intelligence based on high-grade signal intelligence in order to protect the Enigma secret.⁵⁷ Regardless, if ULTRA had revealed the aim of the operation, and the Allied commanders deemed it important enough, they could have disguised the source and sent a warning to Drvar.

Despite the indicators, Partisan forces in Drvar appeared to have been rather complacent and their leadership was “riding high”, flushed with recent successes⁵⁸. Tito himself mentions their lackadaisical attitude towards local defence⁵⁹, and Tito’s Chief of Staff, Stephan Jovanovic, had “sworn that a German airborne attack was impossible⁶⁰. Thus, there were no additional precautions taken in the days leading up to 25 May. Perhaps the greatest evidence of the Partisans lack of forewarning is Tito’s decision to spend the night in Drvar instead of returning to Bastasi as was the precautionary norm.

As seen in XV Mountain Corps operation order for RÖSSELSPRUNG in Annex A, their linkup was to be effected with 500 SS on 25 May. “The 373rd Division will set out on X-day at 0500 hours out of the Srb area with a regimental group (Battle Group Willam) and ... under all circumstances, relieve the 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion in

⁵⁷ F.H. Hinsley, British Intelligence in the Second World War, Abridged Version, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 362.

⁵⁸ Robert B. Asprey, War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1975), 476.

⁵⁹ From a 1 June 1974 speech by Tito, quoted in Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 145.

⁶⁰ Charles Whiting, Hunters From the Sky: The German Parachute Corps 1940-1945, (London: Leo Cooper, 1957), 113.

Drvar on that same day.”⁶¹ The fact that this did not occur until noon the next day did not affect the failure to destroy Tito and his headquarters. The linkup was intended to occur after the primary mission had been achieved and would take no part in the elimination of Tito. That was the job of 500 SS by their surprise assault. The linkup delay is not an excuse for mission failure.

Intelligence and Interagency Cooperation

Understandably, there was also considerable confusion and wasted effort in the operational and particularly in the clandestine intelligence field, with *Wehrmacht* and SS agencies trying to accomplish similar missions for their respective commands.⁶²

The intelligence shortfalls that plagued Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG were rooted primarily in poor German inter-organization relations and cooperation, including the sharing of intelligence. At least three intelligence organizations or departments were involved in the hunt for Tito. First, there were conventional organizations, namely elements of Army Group F and specifically Second Panzer Army, whose primary intelligence came from the *Abwehr*'s Section I personnel and their own intelligence staffs. Second, there were elements of the *Brandenburgers*, primarily consisting of the First and Fourth Regiments along with independent operatives, who were the *Abwehr*'s special operations wing. Finally, the infamous Major Otto Skorzeny arrived on the scene with personal orders from Hitler to eliminate Tito. With the egos involved, and the competitive and distrustful command climate that Hitler had engendered throughout the

⁶¹ Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 118.

⁶² Kennedy, USA CMH Publication 104-18, 76.

German forces, it is an overstatement to say that relations amongst all of these organizations were harmonious.

Attached under the direct control of the Ic (Intelligence Staff Officer) of Army Group F was FAK 201 (*Frontaufklaerungskommando* – front reconnaissance or spy command) from the *Abwehr's* Section I⁶³. It was roughly company-sized and consisted of approximately 10 FATs (*Frontaufklaerungstrupp* – front reconnaissance or spy troops), each a team of approximately six or eight operatives of officer rank with a varying number of locally recruited fighters. These FATs were focused on guerilla warfare. As part of that, they were responsible for gathering intelligence, and more apparently, enlisting the support of various factions in operations against the Partisans. It does not appear, however, that the intelligence gathered on Partisan activities relating to Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG was significant. Of note, FAT 216, under the control of the Second Panzer Army Ic and commanded by Lieutenant Zavadil, as mentioned earlier, was attached to 500 SS for RÖSSELSPRUNG with the task of gathering intelligence.

Before the arrival of Skorzeny, it was the *Brandenburgers* from the *Abwehr's* Section II who enjoyed the most success in gathering intelligence. This unit was composed of ethnic Germans who spoke local languages and contained a large number of highly educated operators within its ranks. They interacted frequently with the local populace and had many contacts in the *Chetnik* and *Ustachi* forces. Although special operations were their forte, their ranks were becoming thinner with the course of the war

⁶³ The *Abwehr* was divided into three distinct and independent sections. Section I was responsible for intelligence, Section II for special clandestine operations and Section III for counter-intelligence. James Lucas, *Kommando*, 17.

and they were being used increasingly in conventional roles⁶⁴ – evinced here with the First Regiment’s front line combat role during RÖSSELSPRUNG.

It was the *Brandenburg* Lieutenant Kirchner whose contribution made the greatest significance to the intelligence actually used in this operation. Tasked to find Tito by *Brandenburg* headquarters, and outside the chain of command of Second Panzer Army, Kirchner began operations in the Banja Luka area in October of 1943 with an organization loosely translated as the “Poacher Squad”.⁶⁵ By enlisting the aid of local *Chetnik* forces, he narrowed the location of *NOVJ* headquarters to the town of Jajce and received information that Tito was present there attending the second meeting of the *AVNOJ* (Anti-Fascist Council of the National Liberation of Yugoslavia)⁶⁶. Kirchner suggested several options for a surgical strike to eliminate Tito, but these were ignored in favour of a larger attack – part of the German Sixth Offensive. General Rendulic was initially upset that the young and ambitious Kirchner was operating in his area of responsibility but outside of his control, and had the possibility of usurping his coveted glory. Due to the accuracy of the intelligence Kirchner obtained about Jajce, however, Rendulic grudgingly began to rely on him.⁶⁷

Following the failure to destroy Tito and his headquarters during the Sixth Offensive, Kirchner was again given the task of rediscovering Tito. Given the importance of the task, on order of the *Brandenburg* high command, Kirchner’s group

⁶⁴ Captain Harry K. Lennon, “Excerpts from a Report on the German Sabotage System, 23 July 1945, USFET Interrogation Center, CIR/4”, Covert Warfare, Volume 13, 5.

⁶⁵ Jokic, Drvar Grad-Heroj, 13.

⁶⁶ Sattler, Desant Na Drvar, 15.

⁶⁷ Popovic, Desant Na Drvar, 23.

was subsumed into the Benesch Special Unit⁶⁸, under the command of *Brandenburg* Major Benesch. Kirchner still, however, had the lead role. Again using his *Chetnik* contacts, he tracked Tito to Potoci, and then to Drvar. Going forward himself, he apparently established a patrol base towards Bos Grahovo and got very close to the site of the Drvar cave by way of the Klekovac Mountains⁶⁹. Partisan radio broadcasts were intercepted by German signals intelligence and served to confirm Kirchner's facts. It is apparent, however, that he did not have the exact details of the Partisan dispositions within Drvar, most importantly the exact location of Tito and his headquarters.

Next to arrive on the scene was the flamboyant SS Major Otto Skorzeny. One of Hitler's favorites after the daring rescue of Mussolini in September of 1943, he quickly became the shining star of the *SD (Sicherheitsdienst -Security Service of the SS)* and developed the nascent *Führer's SS Jagdverband* (Hunting Unit) for special operations. Riding on this wave of popularity, Skorzeny became involved in a multitude of unconventional and high-risk operations, some of which, such as a planned assassination of Churchill, were not carried through to fruition.⁷⁰ Arising from this aura of success came Hitler's edict to Skorzeny, "Get Tito, alive or dead."⁷¹

Skorzeny arrived in Bosnia in April of 1944 and after four weeks of following up leads and conducting some patrolling at great personal risk, he determined that Tito was

⁶⁸ Franz Kurowski, The Brandenburgers Global Mission (Winnipeg: J.J. Fedorowicz Publishing Inc., 1997), 210.

⁶⁹ Kelecevic interview.

⁷⁰ For examples, see Skorzeny, Skorzeny's Secret Missions, Charles Foley Commando Extraordinary, a Biography of Otto Skorzeny (Costa Mesa, CA: The Noontide Press, 1988), and Leo Kessler Commando: Hitler's Special Forces in the Second World War (London: Leo Cooper, 1995).

⁷¹ Foley, Commando Extraordinary, 69.

in fact in Drvar⁷². His information came from a Partisan deserter who gave him detailed information about Partisan dispositions there, including Tito's headquarters cave and Escort Battalion locations. Confident he had Tito's location pinpointed, Tito had his chief of staff, Captain Adrian von Foelkersam, approach von Weichs with a plan to infiltrate Drvar with a small group of soldiers posing as Partisans and eliminate Tito. The Field Marshal, as well as General Rendulic, would hear nothing of it, even when Skorzeny proposed to put himself under von Weichs' command for the operation. As Skorzeny put it, "They saw in me only an undesirable competitor. ...Thus, through the petty jealousy of an officer avid of laurels, a large-scale project, which, if successful, might have had a far-reaching effect, was doomed to lamentable failure."⁷³

The distrust between the different intelligence organizations within Germany was deep seated. The *Abwehr*, the oldest agency, was formed in January of 1921, and from 1935 became a large and formidable intelligence apparatus under the direction of Admiral Canaris.⁷⁴ Its main competition came from the rise of the *SD*, which had gained power under the ambitious and youthful Reinhard Heydrich. The *SD*'s subordinate *RSHA* (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) or Reich Security Organization, created in September 1939, was directly responsible for collecting intelligence for the Nazi Party⁷⁵. The rivalry between Canaris and Heydrich was intense. Despite having served together on the same Navy ship in the 1920s, relations between the two, cordial on the surface, were poor.

⁷² Skorzeny, *Skorzeny's Secret Missions*, 148-150.

⁷³ Ibid, 150-151.

⁷⁴ Lucas, *Kommando*, 15-16.

⁷⁵ David Kahn, *German Military Intelligence in World War Two* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 60.

Heydrich, through deceit and treachery, did his utmost to secure control of traditional *Abwehr* functions.⁷⁶ Hitler encouraged this enmity amongst his subordinates lest any one of them become too powerful. This situation could do nothing but foster a climate of mutual distrust and enmity between the *Abwehr* and *RHSA*, which was to continue throughout the war.

The assassination of Heydrich by Czech resistance in 1942 did not improve relations between the two organizations. Himmler briefly took over the *RSHA* himself and then appointed Ernst Kaltenbrunner to run the organization. Encroachment into the *Abwehr's* activities continued, and, questioning the loyalty of some of the organization's senior members, including Canaris himself, Hitler "decreed the creation of a unified German secret intelligence service under SS control"⁷⁷ on 12 February 1944. Canaris was dismissed (and later to be executed) and the *Abwehr* was placed under the control of the *RSHA*.

Despite this unification, at the time of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG the integration had not yet been effected. Frontline *Abwehr* Section I units, such as FAK 201, were still subordinated to the *Wehrmacht*⁷⁸ and the status of Section II units, namely the Brandenburg Division was unclear. In this environment chaos reigned and old distrusts were magnified as the vying for power continued.

Coupled with this, and apparent throughout the war, was the German officer corps' disdain for intelligence and those associated with it. Author David Kahn has

⁷⁶ Lucas, *Kommando*, 21-23, and Kahn, *Hitler's Spies*, 61.

⁷⁷ Kahn, *Hitler's Spies*, 62.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 249-250.

explained this contempt as a combination of racial arrogance, a focus on offensive aggression, the power struggle within the officer corps in which intelligence organizations threatened their positions and the related authority structure within the Nazi state.⁷⁹ Often, unwelcome news was just ignored.

It is obvious that the planners of Operation ROSSELSRUNG did not even use the intelligence that Skorzeny had obtained, if it was ever shared. Although Kirchner had obtained some valuable information, such as the fact that Tito had established himself in Drvar and precise locations of the British and American missions, which was reflected in the operation order from Second Panzer Army⁸⁰, he did not know exactly where Tito was located. Prime proof of this intelligence shortfall is the choice of Objective Citadel, the heights at Slobica Glavica, which was assumed to be the headquarters' location. This assumption was based only on air photos indicating a trench line, a leftover from Italian use earlier on in the war, several anti-aircraft machine guns, and an American jeep, which was probably only there by coincidence as the air photos were taken⁸¹. For such an important objective, one that the entire success of the operation depended, the intelligence was very tentative. Not included in any intelligence findings, and vital to the mission, was the fact that Tito had moved his headquarters down the road to Bastasi. However, given the coincidence of Tito spending the night in Drvar, had Skorzeny's information been used which would have had the cave in Drvar designated as Objective Citadel, it is quite possible that the operation would have been a success. By landing

⁷⁹ Ibid, 524-536.

⁸⁰ Second Panzer Army Operation Order, 21 May 1944. NARA T314/563/000690. XV Mountain Corps Ic intelligence maps first indicate the confirmation of Tito's headquarters as being in Drvar on 24 March 1944. NARA T314/564/000505.

⁸¹ Kelecevic interview and Popovic, Desant Na Drvar, 29.

gliders on the top of the ridge overlooking the cave, an option suggested by some Partisans after the operation⁸², Tito would have been effectively isolated with no chance of escape.

Even the larger intelligence picture concerning the Partisan dispositions was faulty. All German operation orders from units and formations involved in ROSSELSPRUNG have a common enemy paragraph. These units did not tailor the enemy paragraph to their specific areas of operation or axis of approach, suggesting nothing further was disseminated. The only Partisan divisions that are mentioned are the First and Sixth. The I, V and VIII Corps are mentioned in the 7th SS Mountain Division “*Prinz Eugen*” operation order⁸³ but no mention is made of the subordinate divisions, the ones that would cause the unexpected delay for XV Mountain Corps’ elements⁸⁴.

The Bastasi headquarters cave location demonstrates another failure - that of the timeliness of intelligence. Most intelligence is time sensitive - it is only valid for a certain period, or is just a snapshot in time. Neither Skorzeny nor Kirchner had up to day, let alone minute, knowledge of Tito’s location. The only way of doing that would have been to have agents on the ground reporting his moves. A plan based on dated enemy intelligence greatly increases the risks involved.

It is apparent that there was no cooperation between the *SD*, represented by Skorzeny, and the *Wehrmacht*, represented by von Weichs and Rendulic. What is also

⁸² Kelecevic interview.

⁸³ Kumm, *Prinz Eugen*, 119.

⁸⁴ Some of the intelligence maps from the XV Mountain Corps Ic give indications of several vague division locations, but even this is not reflected in the various operations orders. NARA T314/564/000506-000508.

apparent is that Skorzeny did not share information with members of either of the other intelligence operations being conducted in the area. It is doubtful that he talked to either Lieutenants Kirchner (*Brandenburgers*) or Zavadil (FAT 216), or for that matter anyone in FAK 201. What makes this abundantly apparent is the fact that both officers were attached to 500 SS for the operation. Had they known the results of Skorzeny's findings, they would have undoubtedly influenced the landing plan.

Not apparent in the history of this operation is the question of cooperation between the different departments of the *Abwehr*. Specifically, there is no indication if there was any collaboration or sharing of information between Kirchner and Zavadil before they embarked together for the operation, or between their superiors in the Brandenburg Division and FAK 201. Perhaps this low level coordination of intelligence efforts could have paid larger dividends⁸⁵.

What is ironic is that within six months of the operation, many of the individuals involved in RÖSSELPRUNG became part of Skorzeny's *Jagdverband*. Major Benesch assumed command of *Jagdverband Sued Ost* (Hunting Unit Southeast) with Kirchner as one of his primary subordinates⁸⁶. Many *Brandenburgers* joined Skorzeny and 600 (redesignated from 500) SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion was placed under his command.

The Tactical Planning Failure

⁸⁵ In fact, a perusal of the Ic records from XV Mountain Corps indicates no special intelligence for Operation RÖSSELPRUNG. XV Mountain Corps Ic Intelligence Reports NARA T314/565000540-000560.

⁸⁶ Lennon, "Excerpts from a Report on the German Sabotage System", Covert Warfare, Volume 13, 24.

Despite the shortfalls discussed above, there was still sufficient intelligence to conduct a successful operation, providing the plan made allowances for these gaps. A timeless truism of warfare has been that perfect intelligence is rarely available, and that a good plan with less than perfect intelligence but executed in a timely and bold manner has a much better chance of relevant success than an excellent plan executed too late. Flexibility, always important, becomes much more so when intelligence is lacking. According to United States Marine Corps doctrine, “The measure of effectiveness [of a plan] is how effectively planning allows us to adapt to an uncertain future.”⁸⁷ In most cases, success generally depends on a plan being inherently flexible in order to deal with both the fog and friction of war.

In this case, a good plan was possible with what was available. In the execution of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG, the commanding officer of 500 SS, Captain Rybka, overly focused on Objective Citadel, and did not allow enough flexibility in his plan to effectively adapt to unforeseen circumstances. It would seem that he fought his plan and not the enemy. Given the lack of certainty in the exact location of Tito and the multiple escape routes afforded by the complex terrain, he should have allotted a higher priority to contingency planning. His plan appears to have only included one very rudimentary contingency: a red flare would direct all available forces to converge on Rybka’s position for subsequent tasks. During the actual conduct, he used this signal to gather forces for the first attack on the cave.

Although hindsight has perfect vision, it should have been clear from the outset that the most significant contingency that Rybka should have considered was the action

⁸⁷ United States Marine Corps MCDP 5, Planning (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1997), 21.

to take if Tito was not at Objective Citadel. With the characteristic slow tactical mobility of paratroopers once on the ground, greatly hindering flexibility, more planning should have gone into developing a viable contingency plan for this possibility.

Parachute troops have their greatest flexibility of movement before dispatch from the aircraft. Once on the ground and executing their tasks, it is a relatively lengthy process to shift them to new objectives, especially when engaged in a fight. Rybka, however, had excellent flexibility, which circumstances ironically forced upon him due to resource shortfalls. The remaining 220 members of 500 SS would arrive by parachute in the second wave at 1200 hours. As discussed earlier, there was no flexibility in dropping them any earlier due to aircraft shortages. There was much flexibility, however, in insertion location. Suitable (albeit not perfect) drop zones existed on the plateau feature above and north of the cave, east of Drvar before the entrance to the Mokronoge Valley, southwest of Drvar on the Kamenica flats, and to the west between Drvar and Bastasi. Any of these areas could have been used to accept this second wave, as, “practical experiences during the war showed that well-trained troops can make combat jumps [almost] anywhere, except in terrain without cover where enemy fire is likely to engage the paratroops immediately after landing”⁸⁸, a characteristic which applied to the actual second wave drop zone with deadly effect.

Planners, however, must consciously build flexibility into the plan. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, a senior Luftwaffe officer with much experience in Second World War parachute operations, commented on just this type of use:

I do not agree that airborne operations are absolutely tied to a fixed schedule and are therefore too rigid in their execution....Should the

⁸⁸ Reinhardt, USA CMH Publication 104-13, 51.

situation require a sweeping change in plans, however, this can be carried out by signal communications from ground to air and between the flying formations. This will require the preparation of alternate plans and intensive training of the units. Formations on the approach flight can be recalled or ordered to land at previously designated alternate fields [drop zones]. This is less complicated in the case of later serials. In my opinion such changes can be carried out more easily in the air than on the ground.⁸⁹

Even with poor or non-existent communications with all of the transport aircraft, *Fliegerführer Kroatien* could have dispatched pathfinder aircraft earlier to coordinate with Rybka and lead in the second wave. Rybka could have had this force dropped where required into pre-designated contingency drop zones, based on the current situation and not handcuffed to a preordained, inflexible and obsolete plan. Once on the ground, this reserve force could have either blocked Tito's escape route, or attacked in conjunction with the first wave.

Given the situation facing Rybka by late morning, the insertion of his reserve either north or northeast of the cave would have been the most logical. Here they certainly they would not have suffered the same casualties in landing on the primary drop zone which was covered by Partisan fire and they quite possibly would have blocked Tito's escape route. Given that Tito escaped from the cave at about 1115 hours, it is also possible they would have landed right on top or very near to him and quickly overpowered his relatively small escort force.

To successfully execute the flexibility afforded by this second wave, there would have had to been a direct linkage between Rybka's priority intelligence requirements (PIRs) and contingency execution. "PIRs are intelligence requirements associated with a

⁸⁹ Ibid, 42.

decision that will critically affect the overall success of the command's mission.”⁹⁰ After 500 SS did not find Tito at Objective Citadel, Rybka's most important decision had to be where to strike in order to accomplish his mission. His first and foremost PIR obviously had to be the location of Tito. The members of 500 SS tried to answer this PIR, with limited interrogation of local inhabitants and an attempted search of the town, but the real indicator, which the *Fallschirmjäger*s realized too late, was the location of the most intense Partisan resistance. When facing superior forces, the nature of guerrilla fighters is to withdraw and avoid enemy strength, unless of course they are protecting something of great importance. Centers of intense enemy resistance was the key indicator that members of 500 SS should have been looking for. Rybka and his staff should have identified this aspect of the Partisan doctrinal template and planned for it as part of mission battle procedure. The answer to this PIR would have driven the decision point for the contingency execution - that is, what drop zone to use for the battalion's second wave.

Thus, not only was Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG and intelligence failure, but a planning and preparation failure as well. Intelligence must be tied to contingency planning in order to give a plan flexibility and a concomitant greater chance of success. “Only through foresighted preparatory work covering several likely situations is it at all possible to achieve a limited degree of flexibility in the execution of airborne operations.”⁹¹

⁹⁰ United States Marine Corps MCDP 2, Intelligence (Washington: Department of the Navy, 1997), 53.

⁹¹ Reinhardt, USA CMH Publication 104-13, 43.

CONCLUSIONS

Operation RÖSSELSRUNG failed primarily due to poor intelligence, which did not accurately pinpoint Tito's location. Despite this primary failure, the mission planners in 500 SS, namely Captain Rybka, did not acknowledge the intelligence gaps inherent in the operation and consequently did not develop viable and necessary contingency plans which would have given the battalion some flexibility once on the ground. Although the planning and execution of Operation RÖSSELSRUNG can provide a wide variety of lessons in a multitude of areas, ranging from campaign planning to conduct of linkup operations to selection of weapons and equipment for airborne and mountain operations, there are three major takeaways to be drawn from its intelligence and planning shortfalls. The first deals with tactics to be employed in the face of uncertain intelligence. The second is contingency planning. The third, and probably most critical, concerns the importance of interagency cooperation.

Raid Tactics and Intelligence Uncertainty

The plan executed by 500 SS assumed the target, Tito, to be located in a limited area, even though the intelligence did not substantiate this. Based on this belief, the forces employed concentrated too much on the center and did not seal off the objective area. One of the principles of conducting a raid is to isolate the objective. When the exact location of the objective is unknown, the circular probability of error becomes larger, and thus the objective area that is required to be isolated is proportionally larger. Given the nature of the terrain surrounding Drvar, and the multitude of egress routes for a

fleeing target, Captain Rybka should have spread his initial landing forces farther out. A proper terrain appreciation would have shown that the ridge over the cave dominates the town of Drvar and surrounding area and would have been a prime location to land gliders for isolation, observation, and fire support tasks. Partisan forces would have been hard pressed to counter-attack into this position and it would have effectively isolated the cave complex. The danger involved here would be the force becoming stretched too thin. Thus, a larger assault force may have been required.

Thus the resultant conclusion from this is that intelligence certainty, both accuracy and timeliness, must determine objective area size and from that the required force strength. This is elementary risk management and is a central theme to all direct action raids. One way to reduce this risk is to employ a pathfinder element to direct assault forces as they are landing, but this also entails a potential loss of initial surprise. Commanders must balance surprise (for the enemy) with certainty (their own).

Contingency Planning

The second conclusion closely relates to the first. Contingency planning provides commanders flexibility once an operation has commenced to deal with the unexpected. It forces commanders and planners to look at potential modifications to the original plan once the enemy decides not to cooperate or battlefield friction begins its game of havoc. There must be a linkage between the commander's post H-Hour⁹² PIRs and contingencies to be executed, realized through a decision point or points. Commanders must ensure they do not become enamored with their plan and must maintain a maximum amount of

⁹² H-Hour is the time at which an operation commences.

flexibility in allowing them to deal with the unexpected. Again, from contemporary doctrine, “The level of flexibility in a plan should be in direct proportion to the level of uncertainty and fluidity in the situation.”⁹³ Thus, through good planning the unexpected is not the unforeseen.

Interagency Intelligence Support

The final and most important conclusion deals with interagency intelligence coordination and cooperation. The duplicity in assigning tasks and the fostering of interagency rivalry were both typical of Hitler’s leadership style and were directly responsible for the chaotic intelligence apparatus that existed in the Balkans and for that matter throughout the Nazi regime. Von Weichs and Rendulic had attitudes and outlooks that were products of the Nazi system and without higher direction, would not work with the ostentatiously perceived Skorzeny. Either Kirchner or Zavadil, both used to working in an unconventional environment, would probably have collaborated with Skorzeny, but there is no evidence that they ever talked. If they had, the results of this operation may have been quite different, regardless if either the airborne assault or ground infiltration options were used.

It is vital that different intelligence agencies or organizations that are pursuing a similar goal, especially in the same theatre of operations, at least talk to each other. For maximum synchronization, and perhaps even intelligence synergy, the actions of different organizations must be coordinated, preferably at the lowest levels. Stovepipes leading to the top with no branches must be avoided. The mechanism for this must be

⁹³ United States Marine Corps MCDP 5, 74.

made clear, whether it is the designation of a lead and supporting agencies, or by their subordination to the theatre or even local commander. With the case of the *Abwehr* and the *SD*, their coordination chain met right at the top, in Hitler's office.

Even without an engineered climate of institutional antagonism, it is human nature to be wary of other organizations. This is especially true when the organizations possess similar mandates and can potentially compete for recognition and glory. This trait can even manifest itself between and amongst different sections of the same organization. Interagency coordination, at the lowest level possible, must be the norm in a theatre of operations in order for the intelligence effort to be successful. The involvement of multinational coalitions can greatly magnify the problem. Rivalries and turf wars amongst military and paramilitary organizations must be subordinated to the overall objective. When conducting intelligence operations, it would be wise to remember who the real enemy is.

Perhaps one of the best ongoing examples of this is occurring over the exact location of Operation RÖSSELSPRUNG. Several competing (despite the best efforts to be complementary) organizations conduct intelligence collection for NATO's Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia. AMIB (the Allied Military Intelligence Battalion), JCOs (Joint Commission of Observers) and the Multi-National Support Unit (MSU – paramilitary riot police) intelligence patrols (who sometimes, as is the case of the Italian *Carabinieri*, are more concerned with gathering criminal intelligence for their own domestic purposes) are all examples. These agencies are all juxtaposed over the conventional SFOR patrols from contributing nations' battle groups whose focus has

turned to gathering human intelligence.⁹⁴ All have their own mandates and piece of the intelligence puzzle, which often only meet at the very top, in this case SFOR Headquarters. The same problems that caused the intelligence failure for Operation ROSSELSPRUNG are now manifesting themselves in the same location, albeit half a century later.

One must wonder if Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, currently ongoing in Afghanistan, is plagued with the same problems between the Central Intelligence Agency and the United States' Southern Command or the Pentagon. Recent newspaper accounts hints at interagency friction and recriminations, which suggests some of the same problems discussed above may indeed be present.⁹⁵ This campaign has many striking similarities to the German counter-guerrilla campaign in the Balkans, but hopefully the intelligence and interagency coordination failure is not one.

Finale

Despite inadequate operational security, the assault of 500 SS *Fallschirmjäger* Battalion onto Drvar achieved surprise. Unfortunately for them, faulty intelligence caused them to assault the wrong objective, and poor pre-mission contingency planning ensured they did not recover from this error. They did not eliminate Tito and the battalion was virtually destroyed in the process. Had the German intelligence apparatus properly supported them, or if 500 SS had an effective contingency plan to deal with the

⁹⁴ Based on the author's observations during the period March to September 2000.

⁹⁵ Bob Woodward, "Secret CIA Units Playing A Central Combat Role", The Washington Post, 18 November 2001, A1, and Ben Fenton, "Pentagon and CIA at War Over Bin Laden Hunt", Electronic Telegraph, 12 January 2002. Accessed on Internet 13 January 2002. URL: <<http://portal.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2002/01/12/wtal112.xml>>.

initial failure to locate Tito, Balkan history could have been significantly different.

Fundamental lessons such as these are timeless and must be applied to similar current or future operations to ensure success.

ANNEX A

EXCEPTS FROM XV MOUNTAIN CORPS OPERATION ORDER, DATED 21 MAY 1944

1. In western Bosnia, the communist leadership has established supply installations and headquarters in the Drvar (Tito's main headquarters with the Allied military missions) - Bos. Petrovac area (supply center and airfield). There are approximately 12,000 men armed with heavy weapons (artillery and anti-tank weapons) throughout the entire area, as well as a considerable number of tanks in the Petrovac area. Ambush roads are heavily mined and barricaded. Strong enemy resistance is anticipated from the 1st Proletarian Division in the area west and southwest of Mrkonjic Grad and from the 6th (Lika) Division in the area east of the upper Unac.
2. Our *Fallschirmjäger*s and *Luftwaffe* will conduct concentrated attacks against the enemy with the objective of destroying the enemy command and control centers, supply installations and headquarters in the Drvar - Petrovac area. The operation will be conducted under the command of the XV Gebirgs Army Corps using the codename "RÖSSELSPRUNG." The success of the operation is important for the entire conduct of combat in the interior and along the coast. Decisive, clever leadership and the highest commitment of every soldier will be the prerequisite for success.
3. The 7th SS *Gebirgs* Division "Prinz Eugen" with one regimental group and a subordinate panzergrenadier sturmbattalion will break through the enemy resistance east of the Sana and then advance on a wide front between the Sana and Unac in and directly north of the forested mountains, suppress the partisan formations there and secure the supply installations, while preventing the defeated partisans and headquarters from escaping to the east near Drvar. In addition, Battle Group *Sturmbattalion* with the subordinated 202nd Panzer Company will advance from Banja Luka first toward Kljuc (initial attack objective) and occupy the crossing site utilized by the partisan formations there. The 7th SS Regimental Group will advance from Jaice along the rail lines and roads through Savici and reach their initial attack objective, the area south of the source of the Sana around the Mlinista power station. The reinforced 105th SS Reconnaissance Battalion with a subordinated SS panzer company will defeat the enemy formations located in Livanskopolje [Livno Valley], occupy any supply installations located there and then prevent the withdrawal of partisans bands, staffs and Allied military missions to the south, by attacking through Bos. Grahovo toward Drvar. The 369th Reconnaissance Battalion, subordinated to the 105th SS, Reconnaissance Battalion, will advance from Livno toward Glamocko Polje [Glamoc Valley] against enemy forces withdrawing from Drvar to the southeast. A secure defense of Livno must be guaranteed. All battle groups will be accompanied by all available engineer forces.
4. The 373rd Division will set out on X-day at 0500 hours out of the Srb area with a regimental group (Battle Group Willam) and advance through Trubat [should be Trubar] to Drvar and, under all circumstances, relieve the 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion in Drvar on that same day. After joining up, the *fallschirm* battalion will be subordinated to Battle

Group Willam. All command posts and military missions in the Drvar area are to be destroyed. While holding onto the Drvar area, the attack is to be continued toward Bos. Petrovac. Battle Group Willam is to be maintained as strong as possible (artillery, heavy weapons, engineers). Another division battle group, if possible in battalion strength, is to set out on X-day at 0500 hours from Lapac through Kulen Vakuf toward Vrtoce. They are to capture the road hub at Vrtoce and then, depending upon the situation, open the Bihac - Vrtoce road by advancing to the northwest.

5. The 92nd Motorized Regiment with the subordinated 54th Reconnaissance Battalion and a regimental group from the 2nd Croatian Light Infantry Brigade will advance on X-day at 0500 hours out of the Bihac area to the southeast, in order to capture Bos. Petrovac as quickly as possible, destroy the partisans and their headquarters in that area and occupy the airfield and supply installations. The advance of this battle group is of decisive importance. The reinforced 92nd Motorized Grenadier Regiment will advance to clear the Bos. Petrovac area and dispatch elements toward Drvar, preventing the withdrawal of any enemy forces on the road from Drvar to the north and establish contact with the 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion and Battle group Willam.

6. The 1st Brandenburg Regiment with subordinate mixed Croatian elements will advance from Knin toward Bos. Grahovo and conduct special operations against the Prekaja - Drvar line.

7. Early on X-day the 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion jumps into Drvar after a Stuka attack. They have the mission of eliminating Tito's main headquarters immediately after landing. *Fliegerführer Croatia* will commit strong *Luftwaffe* forces immediately before the landing in the target area to destroy recognized enemy groups and headquarters, security and flak positions, thus forcing the enemy to seek air raid shelter. The 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion will assemble at the take off fields on the afternoon of X-day minus one as follows:

Group Rybka (paratroopers) with headquarters, 2nd, 3rd Companies and one platoon from the 4th Company in Gr. Betschkerek (314 men), with the main body of the 4th Company, 1st Company and 40 men from *Abteilung* [Group] Benesch, six men from the Abwehr in Agram (320 men).

The second wave, the rest of the 2nd Company and the *Fallschirm Ausb.* [field reserve] Company will be at Banja Luka (220 men). The 500th SS *Fallschirm* Battalion will be directly subordinated to the XV *Gebirgs* Corps after landing. After establishing contact with the attacking battle group, the battalion will be subordinated to that battle group for detailed combat.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Kumm, Prinz Eugen, 117-119.

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